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VIRGINIA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW COMPLETE
-- *State performed well in some areas, needs improvement in others* --

Richmond – The newly released Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) points out opportunities to improve services to children and families in the state, Virginia Department of Social Services Commissioner Maurice A. Jones said today.

“Virginia did well in some areas,” Jones said. “However, this federal review provides us with opportunities to improve in other areas that will really have a positive impact on services to children and families who enter the foster care system.”

In fact, Jones said, the state already is working with local departments of social services and other service providers on plans for improvements.

In the review, Virginia ranked high in four of 14 measures and 18 of 45 items.

“We expected going into this review that we would have strengths and opportunities, and we do,” Jones said. “We will use this review as a tool to enhance our commitment to improving in all areas.

“Over the last year, one of the benefits we have seen from the CFSR has been a heightened awareness of the importance of improving child welfare services,” Jones added. “There has been a focus on this issue by a collection of partners.”

Virginia ranked high in delivering services to meet children’s educational needs. The state must work on protecting children from abuse and neglect, providing stability in their living situations, preserving the continuity of family relationships, enhancing the capacity of families to provide for children’s needs, and providing services to meet physical and mental health needs.

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The state ranked high for its information system, quality assurance and responsiveness to the community. The state must work on case review, training, service array, and foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment and retention.

None of the 46 states reviewed to date ranked high in all measures. Twenty ranked high in up to five areas. Twenty-six have ranked high in six to nine areas. None have ranked high in 10 or more areas. The national standards have been set at a high mark to raise the bar for services to children in the child welfare system.

“At the end of the review, we were provided some initial input. We immediately began working with our 120 local social services partners and other service providers to develop improvement plans,” Jones said. “Now, we will work aggressively with our partners to finalize and carry out those plans.”

The plans will focus on adoption; workers contact with children and families; involving children and families in case planning and identifying needs and services; training of resource families and child welfare staff; foster and adoptive parents recruitment and retention; court and local agency collaboration; and updating practices, policies and our “way of thinking” about child welfare.

“It is clear that in order to achieve the improvements in the child welfare system that we want to achieve, we will need additional investment of public and private resources,” Jones said. “I expect that will happen. When it does and the federal government conducts the next review of child welfare in Virginia, we expect to see tremendous improvement in our measures,” Jones concluded.

Jones extended special recognition to Bedford, Fairfax and Norfolk for serving as the sites for the review. “Their cooperation and work on behalf of child welfare in Virginia is to be commended,” he said.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is reviewing child welfare systems in all states to determine how well they are complying with the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. This is the first time the federal government has established national benchmarks for child welfare.

For information on the CFSR, visit <http://www.dss.state.va.us/family/cfsr.html>.

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